Vegetarian Diets: Nutrition Considerations

Vegetarian Diets
Exactly what is a vegetarian diet? A selection of foods by a person does not include meat, poultry or seafood, or any food products containing these foods.

- One eating style of a vegetarian (Lacto(milk)-ovo(egg)-vegetarian) is to avoid these meat products, but to eat whole grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, seeds, nuts, milk products and eggs.
- Another eating style— Vegan or total vegetarian— is even more restrictive. Besides all meat products, the vegan eats no eggs or milk products.

According to the American Dietetic Association’s 2009 Position on Vegetarian Diets, that well planned for all stages of the lifecycle (infancy, childhood, adolescence, athletes, pregnant or nursing women) vegetarian diets including the above variations can be healthful, provide the necessary nutrients for health, and help in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.

Consumer Trends
Why are Americans choosing to eat vegetarian meals? Common reasons are stated as follows: health considerations; concern for the environment; animal welfare; economic reasons; ethical considerations; world hunger issues; and religious beliefs. Research in 2006 reported that 2.3 percent of the adult population (4.9 million) followed a vegetarian diet never eating meat, poultry or seafood. About 1.4 percent said they were vegan—also excluding milk products and eggs.

More evidence of increasing interest in these diets are college courses on vegetarian nutrition and animal rights; increased number of vegetarian-themed websites, periodicals and cookbooks; and ordering of vegetarian dishes in restaurants, fast-food restaurants, university and other institutional foodservices.

Nutrition Concerns
A person considering this style of meal planning should be aware that meeting requirement for Vitamin B-12, calcium, Vitamin D, Zinc, iron and N-3 fatty acids. Poorly planned vegetarian diets can fall short of meeting the requirements for these nutrients, vitamins and minerals most often found in meat, poultry and fish.

If a person decides to change to this lifestyle nutrition choice, visit with a food and nutrition professional to assist you in planning your vegetarian meal plans.

Vegetarian Diet Websites
- FATFREE: The Low Fat Vegetarian Archive http://www.fatfree.com/
  Fat-free recipes are featured at this web site.
- FNIC (Food & Nutrition Information Center) – Vegetarian Information
Many vegetarian links, general information, vegetarian nutrition for kids, resources, diets and recipes.

- **Veggie: The Amherst College Vegetarian Interest Group**
  
  [http://www3.amherst.edu/~veggie/](http://www3.amherst.edu/~veggie/)

  The primary goal of this site is to educate the community around about the personal and global impact of dietary choices. They encourage people to be more conscious about their eating habits, and to make informed decisions about what to consume.

  - The Vegetarian Food Pyramid – [http://www3.amherst.edu/~veggie/old/pyramid.html](http://www3.amherst.edu/~veggie/old/pyramid.html)
    
    This web site shows the adaptation of the U.S.D.A. Food Guide Pyramid emphasizing the vegetarian diet.

- **Vegetarian Nutrition & Health Letter (VNHL) – Loma Linda University**
  

  VNHL is a university-associated publication devoted to vegetarian and vegan issues with information to help readers plan meals that are easy, delicious, and healthful.

If you want to know more about how to plan a healthful vegetarian meal plan, see a registered dietitian and/or other health professionals for treatment and medical advice.

Contact ______________________, Texas AgriLife Extension Service _______________ County agent at ______________________, for more information.

References:

1. Mick’s Picks: Texas AgriLife Extension Service Family and Consumer Science website:
   


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